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Democracy, Foreign Policy and the Split Personality of the Modern Statesman

By WALTER LIPPMANN

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WE have all of us noticed with some dismay a tendency of statesmen towards what psychiatrists call split personality. I am not referring, of course, to the kind of double life, often exploited in melodrama, where the official is a paragon of virtue in public, while in private he leads a life of shame. In fact, it is my experience that this view is quite misleading, though you will encounter it in the most advanced intellectual circles. There you will still find it believed that if only the public knew the whole truth about public men, it would be a very dark truth indeed.

That there is a dark truth about most public men I am convinced. Nothing seems to me more certain than that most of them are leading dark, illicit and subterranean lives of moderation and reason. They flaunt their vices to the public; they shiver and quake at the thought that some indiscreet journalist will expose them to the world as men of virtue and common sense. I can think at this moment of several leading politicians in Washington who would rather be whipped than have it known how sound are their views on the bonus, the tariff, the inter-allied debts and the League of Nations. A journalist could do them no greater injury than to repeat things which would convince the majority of their audience that these public men were worthy of the utmost confidence.

This sort of thing is world-wide, as almost anyone can testify who knows, for example, the difference between what the statesmen at Paris were

accustomed to say in confidence, especially at breakfast, and what they gave forth in speeches to their constituents. Those of you who have been in the European capitals recently, and have talked with cabinet ministers and party leaders must have had the same experience. You must have been struck with a sense of how very much greater is the measure of agreement as to what is sane, than anyone would ever suspect from public speeches and public actions. We have had striking evidence of this quite recently. For a few days at Genoa M. Barthou was in actual agreement with Mr. Lloyd George, and it was not until he had been summoned back to Paris and trounced in the press that he remembered that these public exhibitions of ordinary private common sense are not as yet permissible. There is very little doubt that if you could lock all the prime ministers of Europe in a sound-proof room, their real views would soon show an amount of agreement that their public utterances never reveal.

THE JOURNALIST AND THE NEW DIPLOMACY

The split personality of the modern statesman is an almost daily experience in the life of a journalist. You find yourself dealing with two sets of facts and opinions: the private facts and opinions of the great man, and the public version of those facts and opinions which the great man feels called upon to maintain. And as a journalist you must help him maintain the public version on penalty of losing his

confidence: that is to say on penalty of not learning privately what he privately believes.

For example, you write an editorial urging a party leader not to deceive his constituents by telling them they are about to receive large instalments of interest on the war debts. The next day his friend Jim calls you on the phone and assures you that the great man is quite sound on the debt question. Jim has talked to him and the great man is nobody's fool. Get that straight. So don't be excited about it. Keep cool. The people aren't ready for that sort of thing yet; but the great man is leading them on slowly, step by step, towards the appalling and dazzling truth. When will he tell them the truth? Ah, that depends. If things go well and if impatient journalists don't stir up the opposition prematurely, the time will come when the truth will be told. And, in the meantime, is it not better to have the great man remain where he is, with his sound views on this great question, than to let him be turned out by someone who will not only do just what he is doing, but will also believe in doing it?

When this sort of thing happens once, you are angry. When it happens under all sorts of circumstances you realize that it is not simply a question of personal integrity. You begin to realize that you are feeling the effects of a revolutionary change in the technic of diplomacy. You are forced to acknowledge, I think, that here is an aspect of the transition from a diplomacy which was the private concern of a small class of insiders to a diplomacy which is compelled to satisfy the fluctuating politics of a legislature and the still vaguer sentiment of the country as a whole. The transition, to be sure, is not complete, and probably it

will never in our time be carried to its logical conclusion.

Much, indeed, that is meant to seem like perfect obedience to popular sentiment is in reality a carefully stage-managed show. The so-called plenary sessions of the various international congresses are a prime example. These stately gatherings are a concession to the ritual of democracy, rather than decisive and executive councils. Even more than in our national party conventions, the things which are publicly decided have been privately decided beforehand.

Nevertheless, in the hotel rooms or in the nearby villa, where decisions are privately made, the negotiators are to an unprecedented degree conscious of opinion in the legislature and among the voters in the dim distance. They are continually aware of the fact that if they guess wrong about their henchmen or the rank and file, they will be broken politically.

And yet these opinions which the statesman is forever trying to estimate are rarely a clear guide to the questions before him. From the official point of view they are danger signals, telling him where he must not trespass at all, where he may venture at his peril, and where he must make a wide and troublesome detour. All democratic statesmen respect these signposts, or they are ruined. They differ in their reading of them. Some of them can tell the difference between popular taboos that are deeply founded, and taboos which are organized, publicity-man bluff. Some statesmen cannot tell the difference, and to them every stray cat, every goat and every donkey looks like a sacred cow.

PROGRAM OF CONTRADICTION

Allowing for personal differences among statesmen, differences of courage and interest in truth, we must

note that almost without exception, especially in the realm of foreign affairs, the modern statesman is caught in a contradiction: he must defer to the force of opinion because that is where power resides; yet he must deal with affairs in which public opinion is only a very partial, and almost always a merely negative guide to policy. Soon he discovers that there is no pre-established harmony between government *for* the people and government *by* the people. And his indulgence in rhetoric, his evasions of the real issue, his fright at plain speech, his descent into florid abstraction is, in a very large degree, the attempt to effect a working compromise between that which at the moment interests the people, and that which he believes to be in the interest of the people. Between his guess at what the public wishes and his own best judgment of what the public needs, he generally manages to split his personality into two selves, neither of which is on friendly terms with the other.

This great democratic difficulty becomes most apparent in international relations, although samples of it are only too evident within the national boundaries. But at least in domestic affairs the parties concerned speak the same language, have common habits and more or less similar environments. The other side, and the other aspects, cannot be wholly dodged, and so they receive some consideration. But in foreign affairs the others concerned in the business are fenced off, frequently by a spike fence, each not only within its own language and tradition but within its own experience.

Almost inevitably, then, people see the *relation* only as it affects them. They see what this year's taxes will be if interest on the inter-allied debt is not paid. What next year's trade will be if the interest *is* paid, they see less

easily, and what the peace of the world will be if we insist on keeping European budgets unbalanced, they see hardly at all. They judge their own larger interests as a nation, and their still larger interests as members of the human family, by those taxes, those cheap Czechoslovakian wrist-watches, by the default on these bonds, by that bit of experience which has affected them most painfully and vividly.

"No one," says William James, "sees further into a generalization than his own knowledge of detail extends." And therefore, the same man, any man almost, left to his own judgment, will think nothing of demanding payment of the debt to lighten his tax burden, a prohibitive tariff against goods to pay the debt in order to protect himself against competition, and the open door throughout the world to expand his foreign trade. A public opinion resting on no better foundation than immediate experience is quite capable of insisting on such a contradictory program.

And statesmen, bowing to what they call the public will, are quite capable of pretending that such a program of contradictions is feasible. Only in private will they tell you that, of course, it is not feasible. But what can they do about it? Public opinion has decreed, and they must obey.

IMPORTANCE OF REAL LEADERSHIP

But must they? Only on the unnecessary assumption that their presence in public office is essential to the safety of the republic, is it necessary for public men to drift with the tides of opinion. For how can opinion ever arrive at a real view of a great international question if those on the inside, if those in the know, spend their time waiting for instructions from those of us on the outside who cannot possibly know? On questions as complex as those awaiting settle-

ment in the world today, it is utterly impossible to rely on the mysterious wisdom of the people. And any statesman who pretends that he does rely on it, or can, is trifling with questions of life and death.

For since knowledge of these intricate and far-reaching matters cannot be obtained by consulting your conscience or your sentiments about the bonus or the income tax, the only possible means by which democracy can act successfully in foreign affairs is access to the knowledge which the insiders possess, because the sources of information are in their hands. For the executive in any democratic country to keep his knowledge a secret, and then wait to act until public opinion approximates what he secretly believes, is absurd in theory and unworkable in practice. It ends in drift, factionalism and the deterioration of the standards of public life.

The problems of the modern world

are puzzling enough without complicating them still further by permitting our leaders to abdicate their leadership, because they might be attacked and lose votes. The best wisdom the insiders have may not be enough to save European civilization from an era of deep decay. But it would be intolerable to think that we had not prevented that decay because we declined to act according to such lights as we have. At least we might try, even at the risk of the next Congressional election, yes, even at the risk of defeating a few senators, to have our leaders speak their whole minds, and act on their own full judgment of what the situation requires.

It is this false obedience to an undirected and necessarily uninformed public opinion which, to my thinking, constitutes the greatest practical obstacle to any constructive relationship between the Old World and the New.

Russian Rehabilitation a Prerequisite to World Prosperity

By CAPTAIN PAXTON HIBBEN¹

Executive Secretary, American Committee for Relief of Russian Children, Formerly Secretary of the Near East Relief Commission

PLEASE consider me merely an eye-witness—an American eye-witness—who has observed conditions in Europe, and especially in Russia, today, and who can set before you no more than the reflections that might come to any of you after you had personally visited and studied the situation in Europe as it is now. It is well, I think, to have the authoritative statements of such distinguished gentlemen as Their Excellencies, Dr. Štěpánek and Signor Quattrone. They

give the point of view of their respective countries. But it is well too, I feel, to have the impressions of an American who has viewed the problems of Europe today with American eyes. It is that that I offer you—nothing more.

It has become a habit of late to assume that the return of peace to the world, in so far as that consummation devoutly to be desired depends upon some practical international financial settlement, is a question whose solution is impossible without the concurrence of the United States, and,

¹ Author of *Constantine I and the Greek People*.